

Beware of Warrenism and the False Theology of the Purpose-Driven Church

by Jeremy James

The Purpose-Driven Church developed and promoted by Rick Warren is leading millions away from Bible-based Christianity. This paper shows how his innovative needs-based church is actually a carefully crafted counterfeit of true Christianity, where essential Biblical truths are replaced by concepts grounded in modern psychology, personal development, positive thinking, social transformation, management science and new age philosophy.

This counterfeit of Christianity is given ‘Scriptural’ support by the selective use of 14 versions of the Bible, most of which are dangerously unreliable for doctrinal purposes.

If you are a member of the Purpose-Driven Church then you need to consider the information set out in this paper. You may think of yourself as a born-again Christian but, I can assure you, if you are fully committed to the false theology of Rick Warren, then you are in serious trouble with the LORD.

Background

Some background may help. I was saved less than two years ago. After 19 years a Catholic and then 33 years in the New Age Movement, the LORD in His mercy pulled me back from the jaws of hell. Since then I have learned just how deceitful the New Age Movement really is. But I’ve also learned – to my great surprise – that the same powers of deception are extremely active within the professing Christian community. Heresy, apostasy and backsliding are the norm! A church that preaches true Bible-based Christianity, without compromise of any kind, is actually quite rare.

Of the many false versions of Christianity that I have encountered since I was saved, none compares with that of Rick Warren for sheer deception. Having come out of the New Age Movement, I know only too well how one little lie can build upon another in the most seductive way until a gleaming palace of illusion stands ready for occupation by the unsuspecting soul.

Warrenism is successful because none of its lies are large. It is difficult (though not impossible) to point to a specific passage in *The Purpose Driven Life* and declare, beyond all doubt, that it is false. Nonetheless, most of the bricks from which the palace of Warrenism is built are slightly irregular. Only after a sufficient number have been set in place can we see the gaps and misalignments that result. The shelter and security that it is meant to provide are just an illusion.

The Warren school of stagecraft

Warrenism exploits the biggest weaknesses in human nature. In our fallen state, we crave uniformity, acceptance, recognition and an easy life. We want our flaws to be excused and our talents to be acclaimed. No one wants to be told that they are a filthy wretch in the eyes of God and that, no matter how 'good' they are, if they are not born again in Christ, they are destined for hell. So Warren takes care NEVER to highlight this devastating spiritual fact. Even though it is the fundamental message of the Gospel – a hard and frightening message in a way – it is pushed far into the background in Warrenist theology.

The reader of *The Purpose Driven Life* is drawn more and more into Warren's false gospel by his steady use of Scriptural references. He quotes nearly 750 Biblical verses over the course of 40 chapters, all of which seem to support his unorthodox theology.

Few readers ask the obvious question: If this new version of Christianity is Biblically sound, then why has it never been taught before? After all, if Warren is right, then many giants of Christian doctrine were sorely mistaken. We can forget Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, C H Spurgeon, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, H A Ironside, Vernon McGee, D L Moody, A W Tozer, Martin Lloyd Jones, R A Torrey and many, many more. If Warren is right, then these men were wrong.

Indeed, Warren has such confidence in his views that he believes they will inaugurate a new Reformation (His ambitions are matched only by his modesty).

On the other hand, if Warren is wrong – and I have no doubt that he is – then how has he managed to fool so many? Like a consummate stage magician, he has performed a fabulous trick which no one in his audience is able to figure out. Normally, the only people who can unravel the secrets behind such tricks are other stage magicians. During my 33 years in the New Age, I was an innocent party to many such deceptions, so (to my shame) I probably qualify as a former stage magician. If so, then please let me demonstrate how Mr Warren, the master of modern stagecraft, has performed the great multi-million dollar illusion.

How to fool sincere seekers of God

Firstly, for a good trick to work, the audience must be convinced that it is impossible. Warren sets the stage, as it were, by quoting Scripture so often that you are sure every move he makes is legitimate and in plain view. None of the 40 chapters in *The Purpose Driven Life* is very long, and each is fairly easy to understand. There hardly seems to be any room for a clever manoeuvre or sleight of hand. This apparent simplicity does much to reinforce the illusion.

A good stage performer exploits the tendency in his audience to make many natural assumptions. Then, by carefully misdirecting their attention, he can entice them into focusing on the wrong part of his act.

So which part of the Warren ‘act’ is the most deceptive? Actually, it is the part you trust the most – the Bible itself.

This has only been possible through what might be described as ‘advances in technology.’ The great stage magicians of the 19th century were constantly on the look out for scientific and technical innovations of which the general public was not aware. They could then devise new acts which secretly incorporated these advanced techniques.

Warren has exploited the religious equivalent of an advance in technology, namely the appearance in recent decades of several new translations of the Bible. These give incredible scope for anyone who is so minded to manufacture new doctrinal concepts while maintaining a veneer of Scriptural authority. Warren exploited this to the maximum extent in *The Purpose Driven Life*, where he used no fewer than 14 different versions of the Bible to support his artificial theology (See the table on the next page).

Multiple Bible Versions

He knew that most members of the public have no idea that many of these modern translations are seriously flawed. The standard of scholarship behind them is abysmal. To count as a ‘new’ translation for copyright purposes, the proposed text must differ from all other versions by a specified amount. Thus there is a powerful incentive for these so-called scholars to amend the Word of God in as many ways as they can. Only by doing this can they accumulate enough changes to enable their ‘product’ to qualify as a new version of the Bible for copyright purposes. In other words, the system encourages invention, misinterpretation and distortion. Some of the so-called modern ‘translations’ are nothing more than a sloppy paraphrase of the original. Many of them are unsuitable even for devotional purposes and there is definitely no justification for using any of them to support a new doctrinal position. They simply lack the rigour and accuracy needed for this purpose.

But this didn't stop Rick Warren. He went right ahead in the knowledge that few of his readers would know the limitations of the material he was using. He then cherry-picked his way through the 14 versions of the Bible to find the verse he was looking for. If he got stuck, he could always fall back on *The Message* – a paraphrase of the Bible which is so perverse that it is viewed by many as a deliberate attempt to undermine the revealed Word of God.

Like an accomplished stage magician, Warren moves smoothly through his 40 chapters with both flair and self-confidence. The more assured the performance and the more omniscient the narrator, the greater the illusion. The reader is left in no doubt that such a *tour-de-force* could only have been possible because it was based on truth. And Warren uses nearly 750 verses from Scripture to reinforce this perception. He is especially fond of translations which include words and concepts that figure prominently in his own philosophy. These include *purpose, vision, goal, focus, test, accomplish, relationship, friendship, imagination, heart, experience, attitude, ability, practice, successful, message, power, change, plan, mature, balance, and wholeness*.

It is no accident that these same words feature often in the vocabulary of personal development and self-esteem psychology.

	BIBLE VERSIONS used by Rick Warren	Times used	% of Total
NLT	New Living Translation (1996)	145	19%
NIV	New International Version (1978)	120	16%
MSG	The Message (Bible) (1993)	116	16%
TEV	Today's English Version / Good News Translation (1992)	87	12%
LB	Living Bible (1979)	81	11%
NCV	New Century Version (1991)	63	8%
CEV	Contemporary English Version (1995)	55	7%
GWT	God's Word Translation (1995)	31	4%
KJV	King James Version (1611)	14	2%
PH	New Testament in Modern English (Phillips) (1958)	11	1%
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1973)	8	1%
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1990)	5	<1%
AMP	Amplified Bible (1965)	4	<1%
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)	4	<1%
	Total number of verses -	744	100%

Modern Bible versions are peppered with many vague and inappropriate words of this kind. This is why Warren draws nearly two-thirds of his quotations from versions published after 1990. The more often the reader sees such ambivalent, vision-laden words in the verses cited by Warren, the more likely he is to accept his theology.

	BIBLE VERSIONS published after 1990	Times used	% of Total
NLT	New Living Translation (1996)	145	19%
MSG	The Message (Bible) (1993)	116	16%
TEV	Today's English Version / Good News Translation (1992)	87	12%
NCV	New Century Version (1991)	63	8%
CEV	Contemporary English Version (1995)	55	7%
GWT	God's Word Translation (1995)	31	4%
	Total number of verses -	497	66%

Anyone who uses 14 versions of the Bible in the same book clearly has little or no respect for any one translation. This is highly problematic since it strongly implies that no translation is reliable. And if no translation is reliable, then the fundamental doctrines of Christianity are not clearly set down in any single authoritative source. The only way one can identify what these doctrines are is to depend upon a leading Biblical scholar to show us – presumably someone like Warren himself. When this happens, we end up with the doctrine of men, with all the errors, omissions and distortions that this implies.

The Actual Word of God

Scripture, we must remind ourselves, is not the human expression of divine ideas. The LORD did not inspire the prophets with thoughts and images, but with *actual words*. The very words themselves are inspired. Thus a paraphrase is never more than a human product. It is NOT the Word of God. Of all the Bibles used by Warren, only the King James Version avoids the pitfalls of paraphrasing and dynamic interpretation, i.e. the re-statement of the original text in a more accessible idiom.

Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make **my words in thy mouth** fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. (Jeremiah 5:14)

Pastor Bob DeWaay drew attention to the central problem in Warren's treatment of Scripture when he said: "The Scriptures, being the very voice of the Holy Spirit to men, must always be handled with a holy sense of awe and the utmost respect for the meaning of the text." (p.208).

Warren's liberal attitude is further underlined by another technique that he used in *The Purpose Driven Life*. Normally, when one quotes a verse from Scripture in one chapter, and finds a need to use the same verse again in a later chapter, one simply reproduces the same text. This is so obvious that it should not need to be stated. But this is not what Warren did. On no fewer than **121** occasions he uses a *different* translation of a verse from the one he had used previously. In this way he is able to quote even more verses from Scripture in support of his position than was otherwise possible. In some instances the same verse is quoted *3-4 times*, but in a *different* translation each time. (See the **Appendix** for a complete listing of these verses, where they occur, and the Bible version used in each case.)

If you are comfortable with this approach, then you are rejecting the methodology behind several hundred years of Biblical scholarship and exegesis. If the identification of sound doctrine is dependant on human ingenuity and *special* people who have a *talent* for identifying the true Word of God, then sincere Christians everywhere are at the mercy of a self-appointed elite.

What is the Warren Gospel?

A detailed analysis of the Purpose Driven Church would require far more space than this paper allows, but I will try to capture the key differences between the Warren Gospel and the true Biblical Gospel in a few short pages.

Let's look first at the true Gospel to remind ourselves what the Bible actually teaches:

The Gospel according to the Bible

Everyone is born under condemnation by God. They are destined for hell unless they repent with their whole heart and accept the gift of salvation through the blood of Christ. He has paid our sin debt for us. Only by being born again can we acquire a new, regenerated self which is able to live in submission to the will of God. When this happens, the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence inside us. Our daily walk with Christ is built on prayer, worship, the study of Scripture and separation from the values of this world.

This ought to be the Gospel taught by the Purpose Driven Church, but it's not. In fact, it would be virtually impossible for an unbeliever, through a careful study of *The Purpose Driven Life*, to distil this message from its 300-odd pages. If this is the case, then what will the average reader understand as the 'gospel' in the Warren system of salvation? This is a question everyone should ask since it is central to what the Purpose Driven Church is all about.

Here is one plausible formulation:

The Gospel according to the Purpose-Driven Church

God loves you unconditionally. He wants you to be happy. All you have to do is trust Jesus and everything will work out well for you. You should live always with the understanding that you are special and that you are on a journey of self-discovery. By working every day on your relationship with Jesus and helping to improve the world, you are fulfilling your mission and purpose in life. It is the duty of every Christian to go into the world and tell everyone to trust Jesus. If we all do this, the world will become the beautiful place it was always meant to be.

While it is doubtful whether 100% of the PDC membership would agree fully with this definition, I think it is fair to say that most would find it broadly acceptable.

But compare it with the Bible-based Gospel given above! It is obvious that we are not talking about the same gospel. The chasm between the two is not merely the result of diverging approaches to Biblical exegesis. The PDC version cannot even be described as a modernised presentation of a traditional message. There is simply no escaping the fact that the two gospels are distinctly different. And since the Biblical version must be true, the Warren version must be false.

Having said that, the Warren version has enjoyed, and will continue to enjoy, wide popular appeal. His 'news' is more agreeable and more comforting to the ears and expectations of the unsaved sinner. It is also much more in tune with the times we live in, where tolerance is prized above truth and personal fulfilment above doctrinal accuracy.

The Anatomy of Warrenism

Now that we know in a general sense how Warrenism differs from true Christianity, we can look more closely at its component parts and see how they simulate the message of the Gospel. When I began to compile this paper I expected to find about five or six key differences. However, as unsettling as that would have been, the final count was considerably higher.

The table below lists all the ways Purpose Driven theology differs from true Christian theology. The differences are not cosmetic or superficial, but in many cases profound and in every case substantial. While there may be a degree of overlap between some of the factors, taken collectively they constitute two completely different, and incompatible, theologies. It is quite clear that no Christian could subscribe to both of them. If you accept traditional Biblical theology, as set out in the writings of dozens of reputable Biblical scholars over the past three hundred years or more, then Warrenist theology may strike you as a sad and rather eccentric parody of what God actually said for our benefit.

	Basic Elements of Christian Theology	Basic Elements of Warren Theology
1	Repentance	Regret
2	Faith	Feeling
3	Sin	Mistakes
4	Grace	Results
5	Church	Team
6	Believer-directed	Unbeliever-driven
7	Evangelism	Marketing
8	Judgment	Reform
9	Rebirth	Commitment
10	Humility	Self-Esteem
11	Adamic Need	Felt Need
12	Sanctification	Self-Improvement
13	Prophecy	Self-Enhancement
14	Self-Denial	Self-Fulfillment
15	Doctrine	Dialogue
16	Redemption	Acceptance
17	Separation	Involvement
18	Prayer	Techniques
19	Scripture	Manuals
20	Worship	Self-Expression

► **Warren has replaced Repentance with Regret**

Warren does not highlight the central truth about man, namely, that he is under condemnation by God. The truth is acknowledged, of course, but it sits quietly in the background. As a result members of the Purpose Driven Church tend to perceive their fallenness in terms of a metaphysical condition, a general misalignment with God that affects all mankind. They are not taught that they are *personally* under condemnation by the Almighty, that they have *personally* sinned and rebelled against God, and that they must *personally* repent for this. This direct accountability to God is replaced by a vague sense that man has strayed and only needs to get back on track. As a result, true repentance is replaced by a sense of regret.

Pastor David Cloud made the following observation:

Warren's incredibly shallow approach allows any person who will admit that he is a sinner in any sense to pray a prayer and then think of himself as a genuine Christian, even though he might continue to deny what the Bible says about sin.

- *A Review of Rick Warren's 'The Purpose Driven Life'*, 3 April 2007

► **Warren has replaced Faith with Feeling**

The meaning of faith and the power of faith in Warren's writings are both vague and unconvincing. Time and again he speaks of faith in terms of one's emotional attunement to Christ. Faith is treated as an attitude or a psychological disposition rather than an unconditional belief in the saving blood of Christ. In the Purpose Driven Church, faith is something that grows through service, while the Bible teaches that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." This central truth cannot be emphasised by the Purpose Driven Church since it would require an authoritative Bible, not a proliferation of translations, versions and paraphrases.

► **Warren has replaced Sin with Mistakes**

Warren greatly plays down the offensiveness of sin, the fact that it is utterly abhorrent in the eyes of God. Instead sin is treated as something akin to the misdemeanours of an errant child. God is portrayed as a patient parent who gradually nudges the child in the right direction and gets him to behave as he should. But this is a false doctrine. Sin is not faulty or flawed behaviour, but the very essence of rebellion. God does not tolerate sin in the same way that a parent tolerates a certain amount of inappropriate conduct in a child. The reality is that God hates sin. And sin separates us from God. Thus sin cannot be portrayed in any sense as a mistake and to do so is to trivialise the magnitude of what Christ achieved for us on the Cross.

► **Warren has replaced Grace with Results**

A recurring theme throughout the Purpose Driven philosophy is that grace becomes evident through the results we achieve while serving God. This is implied in various ways and to varying degrees, but the bottom-line is always the same: If you are in receipt of God's grace then it will manifest in a way the world can see. But this doctrine is not found anywhere in the Bible. God's grace and blessings may never manifest in any form that others can see. Take Jeremiah, for example. He received the living Word of God for many, many years and preached it fearlessly, but without results. No one listened to him. Noah preached for over a hundred years and failed to convert even one sinner. The Purpose Driven Church would have dismissed both of these extraordinary men as unmitigated failures.

► **Warren has replaced the Church with a Vision-directed Team**

The Purpose Driven Church places great emphasis on *vision*. As a long-term objective it implies the interaction and inter-dependency between individual and corporate goals, where members work together over a period of years to achieve something which they believe God wants. The problem with this is that it redefines the church, not as a living body led by our High Priest, but as a team whose purpose is determined by the collective will of its members. This approach fails to see that the church is unlike any worldly organisation and that the rules which apply to worldly organisations do not, and cannot, apply to it. The moment we apply the principles of management science to a church we have, not a church, but a vision-directed team.

► **Warren has replaced a Believer-based with an Unbeliever-based church**

No one can redefine the Gospel. It has been given to us by God. Our task as Christians is to preach it in the full Biblical sense, without compromise or careful editing. It is actually a painful message, at least initially, to the ears of fallen man. No one comes to repentance without recognising that he is completely without worth in the eyes of God. If the Gospel is watered down in any way to accommodate the ‘needs’ of the audience, then it is simply not the Gospel. It may be uplifting and admirable in many respects, but it is not the Gospel and it will not lead to repentance. Thus a church built around the perceived needs of the unbeliever is spiritually empty. It is utterly devoid of true spiritual nourishment. It may ‘feel’ good, at least for a time, but it will not lead anyone to a new birth in Christ.

► **Warren has replaced Evangelism with Marketing**

The Gospel is not a product and cannot be marketed. It actually conflicts in the most fundamental sense with the values of the world, while marketing techniques, by their very nature, are designed to reflect and embody such values. An evangelist is not a salesman. He has nothing to sell. His primary task is to bring listeners to repentance, to help them recognise that they are utterly fallen and under condemnation before God, but that the LORD in His mercy has provided a very specific means of salvation – through the blood of His Son. This news is ‘good news’ but only because the listener understands and accepts the ‘bad news’ about his own spiritual condition. Marketing will only ever emphasize an upbeat message. The Purpose Driven Church is both unwilling and unable to give the bad news.

► **Warren has replaced Judgment with Reform**

The Purpose-Driven Church greatly downplays the judgment of God. As a result it also downplays the righteous judgment that every Christian should exercise in the condemnation of sin. This is subtly interpreted as intolerance or ‘fundamentalism’ by the Purpose Driven Church. If one truly loves another, one never shows him anything less than complete respect. But this confuses the sin with the sinner. The Bible teaches that we love the sinner but not the sin. We should hate the sin just as God hates the sin. The Purpose Driven Church seeks to change the world without judging it, to promote reform without emphatically rejecting the sin that makes repentance necessary.

► **Warren has replaced Rebirth with Commitment**

Many unbelievers have great difficulty with the Christian doctrine of the new birth. Even many professing Christians are confused by it. The most common misconception is that the fundamental spiritual change which comes when one is “born again” is achieved gradually, through a process which extends over a period of time and is facilitated by one’s good works and service to God.

As noble as this may sound, it is actually false. The day one truly repents and comes to Christ, one is re-born. Rebirth is not a process but an *event*. The Purpose Driven Church is very vague about the new birth, and often seems to equate it to a process. Warren seems determined to move away from the doctrine of the new birth since it smacks of ‘fundamentalism’ and the kind of black-and-white theology that he believes is unbecoming in a modern, broadminded Christian. While it is not clearly stated, the Purpose Driven Church seems to assume that anyone who becomes a member is born again.

The harsh reality, of course, is that church membership never saves anybody. And by implying that it does, however obliquely, Warren is doing a dreadful disservice to his members. (Pastor David Cloud called it “a crime and a disgrace to the cause of Christ” – *The Calvinism Debate*, p.48)

Also, by requiring applicants to sign a covenant as a condition of membership, the Purpose Driven Church is brazenly violating the Biblical prohibition on oath-taking. This is a well-known ploy among New Age organisations which use it to establish a hold over their members and create a subtle sense of exclusivity.

► **Warren has replaced Humility with Self-Esteem**

In and of ourselves, we have no reason to feel worthy. Worthiness comes only through the cleansing blood of Christ. However, the unsaved person does not know this. He feels he must have some intrinsic value or worth in the eyes of God, and he estimates this worth in terms of his accomplishments. Psychology often equates good mental and emotional health with high self-esteem and a strong sense of self-worth. And this is broadly what the Purpose Driven Church does. Like the Robert Schuller school of Christianity, it teaches that a Christian can only reach his full potential by developing a healthy measure of self-esteem. The strength which comes from this is meant to enable him to serve Christ in the world. But none of this is Biblical. Christ stated several times that the last shall be first and the first last. The strength to serve does not depend on self-esteem but on trust in God and the joy that comes from being obedient to His holy will. Many of God’s chosen servants felt utterly unworthy of their calling – Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon, Peter, etc. None of them would have made the grade in the Purpose Driven Church.

► **Warren has replaced Adamic Need with Felt Need**

The Purpose Driven Church is very much a needs-based ministry, but the needs it addresses are those which its members themselves have identified. These are known as perceived or felt needs. The problem with this approach is that we have deeper needs, spiritual needs, which are not easy to discern. Some are beyond the limits of our understanding. These arise mainly from the fact that we are descendants of Adam in his fallen state. Only the Holy Spirit can bring them to our attention. The condition of fallen man is so severe that he cannot even recognise his fallenness, and were it not for the grace of God, sometimes called prevenient grace, he would never come to this recognition. The Purpose-Driven Church ignores the seriousness of our Adamic needs, the fatal deficiencies in our being which, by our own devices, we can never address.

► **Warren has replaced Sanctification with Self-Improvement**

The concept of sanctification is alien to the world we live in today. It means to set aside for God's purpose and His alone. This is not something we can achieve through our own efforts, since only God can define His purpose. So a true believer asks the LORD in prayer to sanctify an aspect of his life. Self-improvement, on the other hand, is something we can achieve through our own efforts. The Purpose Driven Church places a lot of attention on self-improvement since it enables its members to build the skills they need to serve God, to become a better person and to achieve greater success in life. The drawback with this is that it can induce members to depend less on the power of God in their lives and lean instead on their own resources. ("Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." – Proverbs 3:5) Self-reliance and self-sufficiency would appear to be an integral part of the Warren philosophy. While highly regarded in modern psychology, they are not Biblical since they fail to acknowledge our complete and utter dependence on God for all things. ("I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me" – Psalm 57:2)

► **Warren has replaced Prophecy with Self-Enhancement**

This may seem like a strange substitution, but it fits the pattern of the Purpose Driven Church. About one quarter of the entire Bible is devoted to prophecy. That alone shows how important it is to God. Through prophecy the LORD is showing us the power of His holy will, the consequences for man if he departs from the counsel of God, and the inevitable working out of His judgments. Thus prophecy is directly tied to several issues which the Purpose Driven Church is not comfortable addressing – sin, obedience, judgment and condemnation. The consequences for man of resisting His holy will are simply devastating. But this is not a theme that the upbeat Purpose Driven Church wants to pursue. It prefers instead to focus on the Bible as a self-help manual which, if we use it correctly, will enhance our lives on many levels.

► **Warren has replaced Self-Denial with Self-Fulfillment**

The Gospel highlights the depravity of man, his inborn tendency to commit sin and to prefer evil over good. Man can only overcome this powerful tendency by being born again. There is no other way. This means that, when the Holy Spirit takes up residence inside him, he has the power to resist evil and do good. The old nature must be denied and its appetites left unsatisfied. By living in his new nature and denying the old one, the born-again Christian finds joy in his life. The Purpose Driven Church makes the mistake of identifying self-fulfillment with joy. Christian joy is not purpose-driven. It comes solely from living in obedience to the will of God. Self-fulfillment, on the other hand, is predicated on the achievement of goals that we have set for ourselves. The sad reality is that a self-fulfilled existence can be attained while *still* living in the old nature.

► **Warren has replaced Doctrine with Dialogue**

Communication and dialogue are important building blocks in the Purpose Driven Church. They allow people to explore their felt needs, seek feedback and support, and use the wisdom of scripture to find practical solutions to their daily problems. This in itself should not be a source of difficulty, but it goes seriously astray when it treats scripture primarily as a problem-solving tool. The power and relevance of scripture in the Purpose Driven Church is often determined by how well it addresses our immediate needs. When this attitude prevails, the doctrinal content of scripture is pushed into the background. The Bible becomes a self-help manual, a guidebook on how to live the successful life, and little or no thought is given to the countless truths that the LORD wants to teach us through His holy Word, truths which may seem to have little or no relevance to our perceived needs.

The absence of a strong, clearly-stated doctrine of salvation in the Purpose Driven Church is an extremely serious shortcoming.

► **Warren has replaced Redemption with Acceptance**

Throughout his writings Warren implies that God will readily accept us the moment we accept Him. It is as if God is compelled to save us the moment we proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. But this is misleading. It overlooks the fact that God accepts us ONLY because Christ has redeemed us through his blood and paid our sin debt for us. Of ourselves there is not a single thing we can do to please Him and absolutely no basis on which God can ‘accept’ us unless we recognise our complete wretchedness and our total dependance on the blood of His Son. Only then is repentance possible. Only then is adoption possible through faith. Only then, through the blood of Christ, are we redeemed and born again.

This, the core principle of salvation, is completely lost beneath the many ‘visions’ which drive the Purpose Driven Church.

► **Warren has replaced Separation with Involvement**

Separation is an important Biblical teaching. The believer lives in the world but he is not of it. His values are not those of the world and may seem irrational or hypocritical to a worldly person. “...know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4)

The PDC member is expected to form a bridge to the world to reach the unbeliever. In order to do this, he must maintain a steady focus on the perceived needs of the unbeliever – which by definition are shaped by the world and its values. So instead of separating himself as much as possible from this sinful domain, the PDC member is encouraged to maintain his familiarity with the world and its values.

The truth is that no believer is qualified to assess the spiritual needs of another person. Only the Holy Spirit knows those needs. And only the Holy Spirit can convict the unbeliever of his sinfulness. The task of the believer is simply to preach the Gospel, the complete Word of God, without hesitation and without compromise. And he can only do this if he is separated from the world and its values.

► **Warren has replaced Prayer with Technique**

Satan hates prayer because, through prayer, men can call upon God. And God is the only power that can defeat Satan. Thus Satan tries by every means possible to induce men and women to do everything but pray. One of his favourite strategies is to get them to use techniques which are very similar to prayer, but which achieve nothing. These include meditation, contemplation, silent introspection, repetitive prayer, yoga, chanting, the Labyrinth, Lectio Divina, etc. Warren approves the use of ‘Breath Prayer’ – the quiet repetition of a positive phrase throughout the day – and the Brother Lawrence technique known as ‘the practice of the presence of God.’ Both of these are Roman Catholic and both are non-Biblical.

► **Warren has replaced Scripture with Manuals**

The Purpose Driven Church has developed an extensive training regime for both pastors and members. This is designed to inculcate the philosophy and methodology which they believe is needed to ‘market’ Christianity. In practice these evangelical and missionary texts can have as much influence on the individual’s understanding of Christianity as the Bible itself.

In Appendix 2 of *The Purpose Driven Life*, entitled ‘Resources’, Warren lists the books and other material that he recommends for building what he calls spiritual disciplines. Over a dozen resources are cited – and all are by Rick Warren!

Even when Scripture is used, it is heavily skewed towards a Purpose Driven mindset. This is especially evident in the principal PDC textbook, *The Purpose Driven Life*. As Pastor Bob DeWaay has noted: “The misuse of Scripture is so widespread in *The Purpose Driven Life* that a whole book could be written just to correct them all.” (*Redefining Christianity*, p.110) Later he says: “From the faulty foundation of misquoted, misinterpreted and misapplied Scripture, coupled with a relativistic philosophy...Warren builds his own structure replete with strong claims.” (p.132)

The Bible makes it very clear that the Word, and it alone, should guide our actions. See Psalm 119 for example. Any other texts, even time-honoured Bible Commentaries, are for purposes of elucidation only. They cannot direct our actions in any manner.

A central theme in the Pauline Epistles is the correction of false doctrine. Again and again the great Apostle targets the countless ways Satan corrupts the true Gospel with false doctrine and the wisdom of men. The battle against false doctrine is one of the truly great challenges that the church has always had to face, and yet the Purpose Driven Church does not even recognise it as a problem. One searches in vain through *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church* for even a faint recognition of this perpetual danger and the great damage it can do to Bible-based Christianity.

The sad reality is that the PDC is a purpose-driven, not a Bible-driven church.

► **Warren has replaced Worship with Self-Expression**

The Purpose-Driven church is strongly oriented towards a form of worship which unbelievers can readily identify with. This means using the music and other forms of self-expression which predominate in society at large. During worship the accent is on the needs of the unbeliever – who is not yet capable of true worship. Instead of focusing solely on the LORD in humility and reverence, the church is distracted by the perceived needs of the unbeliever.

Music which celebrates the world cannot celebrate God. This ought to be obvious, but for some reason many so-called Christians today do not see this. As Pastor David Cloud noted: “Though the Bible nowhere says nor even hints that God loves all kinds of music, we are to believe that He does because Rick Warren says so.” (3 April 2007)

The Purpose Riven Church

By now the reader must suspect that there is something seriously wrong with the Purpose Driven Church. Its founder did not start with the Bible and the message that the LORD intended for our salvation, but with a personal view of what Christianity is (or ought) to be. He then worked his way carefully through numerous translations of Scripture looking for verses that might support his opinions. Whether or not this was a sincere undertaking on his part, I cannot say, but it was certainly misguided.

The result is a ‘gospel’ that cannot save.

In his highly critical study on the Purpose Driven Church, Warren Smith made the following observation:

Rick Warren teaches only what he wants to teach from the Bible. As a result, there are many important teachings that he skips over, de-emphasizes, and leaves out – particularly in regard to prophecy and spiritual deception. (*A Wonderful Deception*, 2009)

Pastor Bob DeWaay, who also conducted an in-depth examination of the Purpose Driven Church in his fine book, *Redefining Christianity*, came to the following conclusion:

Warren has so redefined the major issues (the gospel, the Bible, the church, fellowship, worship, discipleship, evangelism, and missions), that he has effectively redefined Christianity.

The Cult-like Aspects of Warrenism

If we step back for a moment, we can see that the Purpose Driven Church has many of the characteristics that one normally associates with a cult:

1. A charismatic, authoritative leader or guru.
2. A corporate literature which purports to contain all of truth.
3. A formal membership regime, with expulsion for non-compliance.
4. A selective and idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible.
5. A standardised way of dealing with life issues.
6. A strong emphasis on church membership and growth.
7. A stonewalling attitude to criticism.
8. A strong emphasis on group activities and conformity.
9. An expectation of complete commitment.
10. A firm belief that it can change the world.
11. A corporate, insider terminology.
12. A growing list of aggrieved former members.

Conclusion

We live in an age dominated by deception. If you are a member of a Purpose Driven Church, please give careful thought to the points made in this paper. If you cannot refute them to your complete satisfaction, then your continued participation in Rick Warren's redefined version of Christianity is no longer tenable. Find a rock-solid Bible-based church, where the true Gospel is preached fearlessly, without compromise.

As Pastor Bob DeWaay rightly notes, our time is running out. The biggest problem of all, the "GIANT" as he calls it, is "the wrath of God directed against the sins of mankind that has been building up, gathering interest, and is about to boil over in cataclysmic worldwide judgment."

Only prayer, repentance and true Gospel preaching can make a difference.

Jeremy James
Ireland
15 May 2010

APPENDIX

Verses used in more than one translation in *The Purpose Driven Life*

	Verse	Chapter + Bible Version				
1	Psalms 39:4	6-LB	6-NLT			
2	Psalms 69:9	12-NLT	37-LB			
3	Psalms 100:2	9-LB	34-KJV			
4	Psalms 119:19	6-NLT	6-TEV			
5	Psalms 119:33	9-LB	37-MSG			
6	Psalms 119:97	11-NIV	24-NCV			
7	Psalms 139:13	30-NLT	31-MSG			
8	Psalms 139:16	2-LB	30-NLT			
9	Psalms 147:11	8-CEV	9-TEV			
10	Proverbs 4:26	26-TEV	40-CEV			
11	Jeremiah 29:11	3-NCV	25-NIV			
12	Matthew 5:9	20-NLT	20-MSG			
13	Matthew 10:42	33-LB	33-NLT			
14	Matthew 16:18	17-NLT	35-TEV			
15	Matthew 22:37-38	9-NIV	16-NLT			
16	Matthew 28:19	15-NLT	36-CEV	36-NIV		
17	Luke 16:11	5-NLT	34-NIV			
18	John 4:23	13-NIV	13-MSG			
19	John 8:31	24-NASB	24-KJV			
20	John 13:35	7-GWT	16-LB	17-NLT		
21	John 17:4	7-NLT	39-NIV	29-MSG		
22	Acts 1:8	36-NIV	38-CEV			
23	Acts 13:22	24-NIV	35-NLT			
24	Acts 17:26	2-NIV	11-MSG	38-CEV		
25	Acts 20:24	36-NLT	36-NCV			

26	Romans 6:13	7-NLT	36-LB	10-TEV		
27	Romans 8:17	25-MSG	25-NLT			
28	Romans 8:28	25-NLT	25-NIV			
29	Romans 8:29	25-NLT	22-MSG			
30	Romans 12:1	8-MSG	10-TEV	10-KJV	10-CEV	13-NIV
31	Romans 12:2	1-NLT	5-TEV	22-MSG		
32	Romans 12:5	17-NIV	29-MSG	15-GWT		
33	Romans 12:10	18-NRSV	19-GWT			
34	Romans 14:4	21-CEV	34-GWT			
35	Romans 14:19	18-NIV	21-PH	21-MSG		
36	Romans 15:2	19-LB	23-CEV			
37	1 Corinthians 1:10	20-MSG	21-NLT			
38	1 Corinthians 4:2	5-NCV	34-TEV			
39	1 Corinthians 7:31	6-NLT	38-MSG			
40	1 Corinthians 10:13	5-TEV	26-NLT			
41	1 Corinthians 12:5	30-NLT	31-TEV			
42	1 Corinthians 12:4-6	31-TEV	31-PH			
43	1 Corinthians 12:27	17-NCV	29-NLT			
44	1 Corinthians 14:20	23-NIV	38-CEV			
45	2 Corinthians 1:8	31-LB	35-NLT			
46	2 Corinthians 3:18	7-NLT	24-NIV	28-MSG		
47	2 Corinthians 4:17	25-NLT	40-NIV			
48	2 Corinthians 4:18	6-MSG	6-NIV			
49	2 Corinthians 5:9	9-TEV	10-NIV			
50	2 Corinthians 5:18	11-TEV	20-GWT	20-MSG	36-LB	
51	2 Corinthians 5:20	6-NLT	36-NCV	36-MSG		
52	2 Corinthians 10:12	32-NIV	32-MSG			
53	2 Corinthians 10:13	32-NLT	40-LB			
54	2 Corinthians 12:9	35-LB	35-NIV	35-NLT		
55	Galatians 5:14	16-LB	16-NIV			
56	Galatians 6:2	18-NLT	19-NCV			
57	Galatians 6:4	32-MSG	32-NLT	32-CEV		
58	Galatians 6:10	16-NCV	16-NLT	33-GWT		
59	Ephesians 1:5	8-TEV	15-NLT			
60	Ephesians 2:10	17-MSG	29-TEV	29-LB	30-NIV	
61	Ephesian 4:3	19-NCV	21-NIV			
62	Ephesians 4:7	30-CEV	32-LB			
63	Ephesians 4:13	22-CEV	28-PH			
64	Ephesians 4:23	22-CEV	23-NLT			
65	Ephesians 4:24	22-GWT	22-NIV			
66	Ephesians 5:17	3-MSG	32-LB			
67	Ephesians 5:25	17-GWT	40-TEV			

68	Philippians 1:6	28-NIV	28-LB	28-NCV		
69	Philippians 2:4	19-NCV	20-TEV	34-MSG	38-NLT	
70	Philippians 2:5	23-CEV	34-MSG	34-NIV		
71	Philippians 2:13	22-NLT	23-NIV			
72	Colossians 1:15	22-NLT	22-MSG			
73	Colossians 3:13	18-LB	18-NLT			
74	1 Timothy 3:15	18-NCV	17-GWT			
75	1 Timothy 4:15	28-GWT	32-LB			
76	2 Timothy 1:9	29-LB	29-TEV			
77	2 Timothy 2:15	32-MSG	32-NIV			
78	Hebrews 11:7	9-MSG	9-NCV			
79	Hebrews 13:17	21-MSG	21-NIV			
80	James 1:3	25-MSG	25-PH			
81	James 1:4	25-PH	28-MSG			
82	James 1:12	5-GWT	26-NCV	26-LB	26-NLT	
83	James 1:18	2-NCV	15-LB			
84	James 4:1-2	20-NIV	26-LB			
85	James 4:6-7	26-NLT	10-NCV			
86	James 5:16	18-MSG	27-NIV			
87	1 Peter 2:9	29-GWT	37-MSG			
88	1 Peter 2:11	6-MSG	6-GWT			
89	1 Peter 2:17	16-CEV	17-MSG			
90	1 Peter 4:10	7-NLT	31-LB			
91	1 Peter 5:5	19-NIV	33-TEV			
92	1 John 4:18	3-MSG	37-TEV			
93	1 John 3:16	17-NIV	19-GWT			
94	1 John 1:8	18-NCV	20-MSG			
95	Revelation 4:11	7-NLT	40-MSG			

Selected Reading

- David Cloud *The Calvinism Debate*, 2006
- A Review of Rick Warren's 'The Purpose Driven Life'*,
Fundamental Baptist Information Service, 3 April 2007
- Bob DeWaay *Redefining Christianity: Understanding the Purpose Driven
Life Movement*, 2006
- Gary Kah *The New World Religion*, 1999
- Roger Oakland *Faith Undone: The Emerging Church – A New Reformation
or an End-Time Deception?* 2007
- Warren Smith *Deceived on Purpose: The New Age Implications of the
Purpose-Driven Church*, 2006
- A Wonderful Deception: The Further New Age Implications
of the Emerging Purpose Driven Movement*, 2009
- Rick Warren *The Purpose Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?*
2002
- The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising
Your Message and Mission*, 1996
- Ray Yungen *A Time of Departing: How Ancient Mystical Practices are
Uniting Christians with the World's Religions*, 2006

- For further papers by Jeremy James visit: www.zephaniah.eu -

Copyright Jeremy James 2010.

This paper may be reproduced in full provided no alterations are made.